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SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR A/C FOR LISA KORTE

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [ECON](#) [PGOV](#) [GB](#)

SUBJECT: GABON: UTILITY PROBLEMS PLAGUE LIBREVILLE

¶1. Summary: Electrical and water service in Gabon is becoming increasingly unreliable and is presenting a potentially serious challenge to the government. Previously unheard of, rolling blackouts, frequent power outages, and lack of water are now common. The partially government-managed Electrical and Water Society of Gabon (SEEG) was already struggling to meet power demands in Libreville when a transformer supplying power in the capital blew up, leaving large portions of the city without power for over thirty hours. Short-term solutions include rolling blackouts while the Government seeks new investors in the moribund utilities sector. The outages are increasing the cost of post operations and beginning to affect morale. End Summary.

¶2. Gabon's faltering electrical sector was exposed in 2007 when poor rainfall led to noticeable power shortages. Since that time, SEEG has struggled to meet the increased consumer demand for service. A transformer in Libreville blew up on November 25 leaving entire sections of the city without power for up to 30 hours, something previously unheard of in Libreville. Since then, SEEG has been unable to regularly supply power to the entire city as it works to repair the long-term damage to the transformer. The Commercial Director for SEEG publically announced that a new transformer and generator were ordered "in April" but that they will not be installed for the next six to eight months. In the meantime, the Commercial Director noted that it will be difficult supplying power and water for all of the city residents. As a result, there will be rolling blackouts. The persistent problems led the Government to set up an energy regulatory body and begin an audit of SEEG while it looks for new, more qualified companies to invest in electricity and water.

¶3. Water supply is a similar problem. With a reduction of power, water pumps are ceasing to function at expected levels. Numerous areas of Libreville do not have water for many hours per day and water pressure is low. An increasing number of Libreville residents have begun to meet their daily water demands via public spigots and nearby creeks, which could become a significant public health issue.

¶4. Comment: Sixty percent of Gabon's residents live in Libreville. Public frustration is growing with the unreliable power and water supply. Problems will likely grow more acute when the upcoming dry season begins in the next two weeks, making water even scarcer, and residents even more agitated. We expect dissatisfaction to grow over the next six months and there to be increased pressure on the government to reverse the situation, particularly ahead of upcoming local and national elections. Meanwhile, the Embassy is trying to ensure that back-up power is provided to residences and post operations are not affected. However, unpredictable power outages and a water supply that is frequently reduced to a trickle are beginning to have an

impact on post morale. END COMMENT.
REDDICK